

# **Media Coverage: Help Or Hinderance In Conflict Prevention**

*By Nik Gowing*

Carnegie Corporation of New York established the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict in May 1994 to address the looming threats to world peace of intergroup violence and to advance new ideas for the prevention and resolution of deadly conflict. The Commission is examining the principal causes of deadly ethnic, nationalist, and religious conflicts within and between states and the circumstances that foster or deter their outbreak. Taking a long-term, worldwide view of violent conflicts that are likely to emerge, the Commission seeks to determine the functional requirements of an effective system for preventing mass violence and to identify the ways in which such a system could be implemented. The Commission is also looking at the strengths and weaknesses of various international entities in conflict prevention and considering ways in which international organizations might contribute toward developing an effective international system of nonviolent problem solving.

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## **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to many in diplomacy, government, the media, the military, and NGOs for sparing the time to discuss -- often at great length -- their experiences in conflict management. Their patience and enlightenment -- often during moments of intense pressure of conflict -- helped contribute to the conclusions of this study.

Most asked not to be identified. Despite the inevitable wish of readers to discover the source of some observations by way of endnotes, I have been happy to honour the commitments of anonymity that I made to those who helped clarify my perceptions.

I am honoured that under the direction of cochairs David Hamburg and Cyrus Vance, the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict was moved to recognise this issue of the media and the information edge in conflict, and invited me to undertake this study. Hitherto, this issue has tended to be ignored in the study of conflict prevention and management. I am grateful to Jane Holl, the Commission's executive director, and Esther Brimmer, senior associate, for their patience and persuasive skills during my research and preparation. They helped to focus thoughts and open new doors for further examination. The patience of Robert Lande, the Commission's managing editor, was also much appreciated.

The text as published represents a study undertaken until early fall 1996. The subsequent violent events in Kivu and the Great Lakes of Central Africa through early summer 1997 have raised new and pressing uncertainties in whatever relationship exists between the media and conflict management. I suggest that they require further study as a matter of some urgency.

The media's role in the new generation of regional conflict and substate violence<sup>1</sup> is ambiguous, unclear, and often misconstrued. Journalists and policymakers alike tend to assume that media coverage has an undefined yet pivotal role in helping conflict management or prevention. Indeed, a role for the media in conflict prevention is routinely assumed at conferences, seminars, and gaming sessions without question or any clear understanding of what that role is.

Frequently, there is an undignified rush to judgment. The instinctive assumptions made by policymakers, diplomats, and the military are often wrong. Their instant, superficial analysis of the media's role is usually skewed by the emotion of anecdotal comments as opposed to rigorous analysis. Frequently, the media are blamed both for what does and does not happen.

No reasonable person questions the emotive power of vivid, gruesome TV images from a developing conflict. Senior politicians and government figures refer candidly and without reservation to the "something-must-be-done" pressures created by TV, in particular, *when it is present*.

But off-the-cuff, apparently well-informed references to what is widely referred to as the "CNN factor"<sup>2</sup> are not always helpful to understanding the precise dynamics of this relationship. Often such references are conspicuously ill-informed and based on false assumptions. Understandable, superficial emotional responses by political leaders who make decisions to engage (or not) in a conflict are not the same as a fundamental political will to act in the national interest. This distinction is crucial.

Like many decision makers, former U.S. defence secretary William Perry, for example, confirms the instant power of the CNN factor and the images that pursue him from office to hotel room to home.<sup>3</sup> Pressed further, he talks of "digging in my heels" in response. More important, Perry confirms this author's earlier research<sup>4</sup> that although vivid media reporting from conflict does provide useful tip-sheet coverage of developments, government officials usually consider most coverage to be trite and crude. Former U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns has highlighted the resulting dilemma: "The challenge for us in government is to balance the need to feed the beast of television against the more natural and wise human instinct to reflect before speaking."<sup>5</sup>

It is regrettable, some argue, that more real-time technology and capability to report from the world's zones of conflict have not necessarily been matched by a qualitative improvement in journalism or information flow (however they are measured).<sup>6</sup> Instead, the trend is towards superficial, less-than-well-informed reporting, often based on second- or third hand information as opposed to primary data. The growing drift towards comment and opinion journalism is also identified as an obstacle to clear, impartial comprehension of a conflict and its root causes.

The picture created by such coverage is not as accurate or reliable as initial emotions might lead one to assume. The emotive effect on public opinion can be profound (though increasingly less so). But despite the conviction of many journalists about the powerful influence that their reporting has on policy,<sup>7</sup> ministers and government officials instinctively doubt the veracity of such reporting. In the view of then British foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind, "In complex conflicts it is difficult within the constraints in which journalists operate to portray a balanced picture which properly represents all the factors in a conflict."<sup>8</sup>

Rifkind's analysis is correct. Invariably, the reporter on location does not get it quite right. Sometimes such reporting can be downright wrong. For example, the few "facts" that Lindsey Hilsum reported to the BBC from Kigali during the first days of the Rwanda genocide in April 1994 she now accepts -- as any good correspondent should willingly do -- to have "turned out not to be quite true."<sup>9</sup> In 1991 the TV images of JNA (Yugoslav National Army) tanks in the former Yugoslavia moving towards Slovenia left the impression of a unilateral offensive by Belgrade. The fact that Slovenia had declared independence from the Yugoslav federation and set up border posts tended to be forgotten as the graphic TV images showed a large JNA military operation advancing towards military engagement.

Therefore, rather than acting impulsively, most (though not all) officials treat what they see or read with considerable caution, if not scepticism. They demand further checks and information or intelligence. As Perry confirms: "We know from long experience that the first assessment of what happened is almost always wrong."<sup>10</sup> This official scepticism is justified, given the understandably skewed nature of reporting during a developing crisis.<sup>11</sup> However, the scepticism can also be deployed by governments as a convenient justification for doing nothing; increasingly this is the case.

Hence this author's caution in the opening words of this paper -- that the media's role is ambiguous, unclear, and often misconstrued. This is a crucial corrective to the conventional wisdom that a direct correlation exists between media coverage and political (therefore military)

action in conflict prevention and management. Most important, the result is a government decision to commit itself publicly to the *appearance* of action<sup>[12](#)</sup> by way of palliative humanitarian operations,<sup>[13](#)</sup> rather than through a firm political commitment to do everything possible to prevent or end a conflict, using military force if necessary.<sup>[14](#)</sup> As the controversial five-volume findings of the Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda concluded: "War was the extension of failed diplomatic effort. Humanitarian aid was a substitute for political action in Rwanda."<sup>[15](#)</sup>

Too often a direct cause-and-effect relationship between media coverage and apparent action is assumed. But the absence of national strategic interest, and therefore of political will, is conveniently forgotten and ignored. Signals and actions are often misconstrued. Ministers or government officials signal *apparent* willingness to engage when essentially the political will and strategy are otherwise. This reality is not helpful if the media reporting seems to create a moral imperative to prevent or halt a conflict.

The Rwanda evaluation report was an important exercise. It raised core issues relating to all media coverage of conflict. On Rwanda, it drew this vital conclusion:

The international media played a mixed role in the Rwanda crisis. While the media were a major factor in generating worldwide humanitarian relief support for the refugees, distorted reporting on events leading to the genocide itself was a contributing factor to the failure of the international community to take more effective action to stem the genocide.<sup>[16](#)</sup>

The same could be said for every regional conflict.

The committee's report also urged the media to learn from their shortcomings. The question now is: Have the media reviewed their errors and improved both their performance and insight in subsequent conflicts? Any judgment is speculative. However, based on the new dynamics of the media business described later in this paper, this author's view is pessimistic.

It is, of course, easy to heap blame and/or responsibility on "distorted reporting" by the media. Others are to blame for nonaction. Humanitarian agencies report that too often the governments of developed countries face a proliferation of data and information. The problem frequently is that they are either overloaded or inept at handling it.<sup>[17](#)</sup> Thus, it is not only the media who could do a better job of analysing the information available. Many a government can be viewed as equally culpable of skewed interpretation, but probably for different reasons.

## **The Media or the Mediator: Which Comes First?**

Like the misplaced assumptions of the power of the CNN factor in conflict management, most people readily assume that there is, or must be, a direct cause-and-effect relationship between media coverage and the chances for either preventing, preempting, or limiting a conflict. The emotions created by vivid, gruesome TV images add weight to this assumption.

Again, the evidence suggests otherwise. Conflicts are now predominantly of a substate and intrastate nature in what are described as "sick state" cases.<sup>[18](#)</sup> Rarely is there media coverage of a

conflict that is about to explode. It is war, and the images of fighting, that catalyses TV coverage, in particular, and not the vaguer possibility of a conflict breaking out at some indefinable moment. When it comes to prevention, media coverage is usually too late to help.<sup>19</sup>

Overall, there is now a growing body of analysis and research that, like Gowing's work,<sup>20</sup> questions the conventional wisdom of a direct cause- and-effect relationship, although more case work needs to be done. Livingston and Eachus, for example, debunk the conventional assumption that emotive TV coverage of the humanitarian disaster in Somalia in late summer and early fall 1992 was pivotal in forcing President Bush to approve a U.S. involvement. "News coverage trends do not support the claim that news attention to Somalia led to the Bush administration's decision to intervene," they conclude.<sup>21</sup>

If we extrapolate the conclusions of Gowing and those of Livingston and Eachus, then it is reasonable to conclude that on many occasions (though not all), practitioners in the media and diplomacy overestimate the impact of TV images, especially in the realm of conflict management. As Lindsey Hilsum confirmed after reporting whatever she could manage to see of the horrors unfolding in Rwanda in April of 1994: "I couldn't stop the smallest part of it. I am only slowly beginning to understand it. At the time I could only watch and survive."<sup>22</sup>

## **Pressure To "Do Something": Media Pressure and the National Interest**

Ultimately, despite all the bleating, the vital national interests and strategic assessments of governments hold sway over emotions. Usually those national interests are far more limited than most assume, unless national security is threatened. However appalling the TV pictures and newspaper reporting, in the U.S. (and probably in many other Western countries, as well) "severe human rights violations, including genocide" are most unlikely to constitute a vital national interest.<sup>23</sup>

The official working view of the new generation of substate conflicts further minimises the chance of a significant intervention. They will have "no immediate, substantial impact upon the interests of the great powers" and "the international response to such crises will rarely be decisive."<sup>24</sup>

The approach of governments appears to follow a trend to be noninterventionist, regardless of the power of media reporting. The Clinton administration's Presidential Decision Directive No. 25 defines clearly those limits of U.S. national interest beyond which it is highly unlikely that the U.S. will ever commit itself, certainly militarily and on the ground.<sup>25</sup> The directive came at a time when most leading European governments were exasperated by what they saw as the lack of both understanding and leadership on the Balkans crisis from the Clinton administration.

Eventually, there was a period when the Clinton administration belatedly tried to portray an image of assertive presidential engagement in foreign crises.<sup>26</sup> The high-profile U.S. action on crisis management in Bosnia in the summer of 1995, which led to the Dayton peace agreement, is the primary example. The change of heart and new determination were welcomed

internationally. The U.S. commitment was born out of a fundamental reassessment of U.S. national interests at the time, not because of media coverage. Privately, however, senior European officials remained sceptical as to how deep the U.S. commitment really went and how long it would last.

It could be said that in many ways the scepticism was justified. In March 1996, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake announced a seven-point, "tough-love" checklist of national interests that might lead to a U.S. use of force. In contrast to the proactive Balkans policy of mid-1995, Lake's new list barely tilted at the challenges of conflict prevention created by the new generation of substate conflicts.<sup>27</sup>

Implicitly, the checklist apparently ignored any emotive power of TV and media coverage. Under the new Lake doctrine, defining a clear *exit* strategy seemed to carry more importance than any immediate urgency for a U.S. commitment to entering any conflict prevention operation. When it came to U.S. national interest, Lake defined the commitment as follows: "Increasingly our interests require that our military keep peace *in the wake of* internal conflicts." In other words, a U.S. commitment is likely only when there is peace *after* a conflict. A commitment that might prevent the conflict from exploding in the first place is most unlikely, whether reported by the media or not!

The Lake principles and the definitions of national interest in other capitals of the world help to explain the negligible response to most media coverage of conflicts, whether the conflict is looming or already being fought. Except in rare and unpredictable circumstances which can occasionally lead to "policy panic,"<sup>28</sup> this explains the *political impotence* of TV pictures, despite any personal *emotions* that the images create among ministers, government officials, or members of the public with anything more than a fleeting interest in the horrors that they see or read about.

It can be argued that there is a strong measure of political hypocrisy and cant in many government circles. Leading nations publicly espouse an apparent determination to nip in the bud all challenges to stability and regional order. That, after all, is the tone of deliberations and communiqués at international forums like the G7 or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

But is such rhetoric reflected faithfully in official actions? Governments argue that the new threats to regional stability come not from ethnic fault lines<sup>29</sup> but from "extreme nationalists and tribalists, terrorists, organised criminals, coup plotters, rogue states and all those who would return newly freed societies to the intolerant ways of the past."<sup>30</sup> The former British foreign secretary Douglas Hurd characterised the same challenge with a different twist. "We have an interest in a world which is not run by a lot of tyrannical, blood-stained crooks" he said.<sup>31</sup>

Thus there may be an *interest*, but this author argues that except in moments of policy panic<sup>32</sup> this interest usually does not translate into a *determination to prevent*. This underlines the stark limits to national interest. Determined belligerents coldly weigh up limits.<sup>33</sup> They make a calculation to exploit such international lack of interest to their own advantage.<sup>34</sup>

An example of this occurred during a showing of the vivid TV pictures of the massacres in Rwanda. At a diplomatic banquet in London, Foreign Secretary Hurd described movingly the conflict as a "true heart of darkness" whose details "I can barely bring myself to watch." But for the British government, as with almost all others (except France), such horror and emotion did not translate into a proactive switch in policy designed to end the fighting. The later international response to the cholera catastrophe in Goma was a palliative panic response born out of shame more than a determination to end a policy of systematic slaughter that had already lasted four months.<sup>35</sup> Politically, the impact of TV images in particular was at best marginal.

## National Interest: The Media's Complaint

Many in the media despise the minimalist view implicit in government calculations of national interest. For reasons of self-interest and/or conviction, many journalists who risk their lives to report on a looming or exploding conflict will not be deflected from the view that the CNN factor either directly influences policy,<sup>36</sup> or, if it doesn't, then it should.

Martin Bell, the BBC's distinguished former foreign affairs correspondent, complains that the wars he has covered were the result of failed politics and diplomacy. "The Bosnia war," said Bell, "has left me with the conviction that a foreign policy based only on considerations of national interest, and not at all of principle, is not only immoral but inefficient." Just before leaving TV journalism and becoming a member of the British Parliament, Bell actively promoted the need for what he christened a "journalism of attachment." Many colleagues, however, have rejected the concept.<sup>37</sup> Others continue to argue that without TV coverage, looming conflicts and humanitarian crises would not appear at all on the government radar screen and therefore would be ignored by the international community.

Such expectations are wholly reasonable, of course. And they do make for a powerful argument.

However, once again, putting a conflict on the governmental radar screen is not the same as forcing that government to do something about it. The U.S. definition of "vital" or "extremely important" national interests is not the only one to rule out virtually any conflicts without direct relevance. British national interests, for example, are little different.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, it is hard to find evidence that preemptive media coverage has explicitly led to preemptive diplomatic action designed to prevent a conflict from exploding. Almost none of the covert preparations made in advance of a conflict (e.g., secret weapons deliveries or plotting by adversaries) are ever known to or discovered by diplomats and NGO's, let alone journalists, until it is too late, and the conflict has exploded.<sup>39</sup>

Underlining the chasm between governments of leading world powers and the likes of Bell, Douglas Hurd wrote:

Martin Bell's principle cannot surely be that we should intervene against horrors only when they are televised? . . . Bosnia is far from unique. I can think of eight civil wars raging at this moment, with others simmering. Britain cannot be expected, even with allies, to intervene each time.<sup>40</sup>

Often the international community, once it sees the images, turns away, invokes international law, and declares that the conflict is an "internal matter" for the "sovereign government." Chechnya in November and December 1994 is the most vivid example. Burundi in July 1996 is another. For a variety of reasons underpinned by international law, governments with the power and capability to intervene cited "sovereignty" as a primary reason for doing as little as possible. Such nonresponses are the hallmark of what Martin Bell complains is the "nothing can be done club." Many journalists like Bell take a robust and emotive stand against such negativists. "It is in the interests of all our children -- theirs as well as ours -- that they do not prevail" he wrote.<sup>41</sup>

Nevertheless, the record suggests that despite emotive and often brilliant reporting, the government negativists have prevailed. This author questions whether the kind of moral stand taken by the likes of Bell, whether implicit or explicit, influences politicians who make costly decisions about whether to commit effort and resources to intervene in some way in a conflict. For the many journalists who have witnessed and reported conflicts as they unfold, there is no doubt, however. They want the bloodletting halted in an impartial way. "The case for intervention is not to help one side against another, but the weak against the strong, the armed against the unarmed; to take the side of the everyday victims of war who, until now, have had no protection. It is really a question, finally, of whether we care," wrote Bell.<sup>42</sup>

Except for a few rare moments of policy vacuum, politicians by and large take a starkly different view. Both in Chechnya (claimed as part of the territory of a former superpower) and Burundi (a tiny independent nation with no strategic importance to any great power), the international determination to respect the right of a sovereign nation to reject offers of outside assistance overrode any personal ministerial revulsion at the unfolding horrors being reported by the international media.

### **Chechnya, 1994: Media Coverage but International Inaction**

Chechnya in December 1994 is probably the most tragic example of lack of action. On the day that images of Russian bombing and burning aircraft at the Grozny airport were being transmitted worldwide, the 52 heads of state and government of the OSCE were in Budapest debating European security and crisis prevention measures, no less. The TV images from Grozny were broadcast in the national mission rooms of the conference center as the debate on the principles of European conflict prevention continued. But despite mutterings of concern, the flames and horror of Chechnya created little public resonance among the European leaders. There was certainly no decisive will to intervene to prevent the "limited" Russian military action from spiraling out of control.

It can be argued that, in Chechnya, the key moment to send a decisive political signal to prevent a wider conflict -- including a veiled threat that military action might be part of a determined diplomatic initiative -- was squandered. Political fears and caution among Western nations about intervening in the horrors taking place on the sovereign territory of a great power overrode any emotional reaction being generated by TV pictures that "something must be done." This situation emphasises the clear limitations of intervening in conflicts where a major power like Russia has its own clear national interest.

As a result, apparent European indifference -- based on the hope that Russian defence minister Pavel Grachev was right in saying he could secure Grozny in two hours -- effectively sent a green light to the Kremlin to continue its planned offensive in Chechnya. Less than two months later, Ambassador Audrey Glover, head of the first OSCE delegation eventually allowed into Grozny, described the horror she had witnessed as "another Dresden."

If graphic TV reporting of the carnage throughout Christmas and New Year 1994 had created an impact on the international community to do something, then "another Dresden" might have been prevented. It did not have that effect. TV's impact was minimal.

As Thomas Friedman wrote in a *New York Times* column on double standards in U.S. international diplomacy:

Excuse me, but President Yeltsin kills more people in Chechnya on a slow morning than ever died in Tiananmen Square in 1989. Yet for some reason a U.S. president can go to Moscow to support Mr. Yeltsin and no one says boo. But if Mr. Clinton were to stop off in Beijing he would be pilloried.<sup>43</sup>

Thus one "legitimate" policy option is to ignore the TV pictures and have a policy to do nothing. Constructed wisely, such a zero policy can always be sold politically to a public in developed countries that is both ill-informed on foreign affairs (especially in the U.S.<sup>44</sup>) and increasingly numbed by images of subregional wars in which they have no interest.

## Burundi, 1996: The Impotence of Media Coverage

From 1993 through 1996, the prolonged bloodletting in Burundi illustrated the illogical and inconsistent nature of the media's role in conflict. During these three years a combination of international editorial indifference and the physical dangers of visiting Burundi meant there was virtually no international media coverage of the unending murder and terror producing about 100 deaths a day.<sup>45</sup> Other stories elsewhere in the world took precedence.

Rare reporting like the emotive TV coverage by the BBC's George Alagiah of a period of mass slaughter in Burundi in October 1993 created no international resonance. In some respects, it might be argued that Alagiah's coverage was inadvertently mistimed. When he filed his reports, diplomatic prevention had failed, but the rate of killing might have been described as still only "getting up to speed." To many people, such a suggestion seems obscene. But the level of slaughter in a distant country few knew about had not reached a sufficient critical mass to mobilise international public opinion. So no one else bothered to follow up Alagiah's findings, even though one leading nongovernmental organisation (NGO) said that Burundi 1993 was "the only crisis which caught us by surprise."<sup>46</sup>

After Alagiah, the tragedy of Burundi continued virtually unrecorded by the world media. But the killing got worse, and further warnings from NGOs were ignored.

We now know that the murders Alagiah reported in October 1993 were early warnings of a developing pattern of violence in the Great Lakes region of Africa that the international

community was unable or unwilling to acknowledge, let alone tackle in an effective proactive manner. It was part of a similar regional pattern that led eventually to the Rwanda genocide in 1994.

The international community only gave signs of stirring after the massacre of at least 304 people in Bugendana in July 1996.<sup>47</sup> President Sylvestre Ntibantunganya was then stoned at the mass funeral and forced to seek refuge at the U.S. embassy. Journalists and television satellite dishes descended on Bujumbura. The Tutsi army pulled off a coup, and the international community held its breath.<sup>48</sup> The best that Western ministers could do was to "hope"<sup>49</sup> things would not slide into the full-blown genocide that many feared.

On the night President Ntibantunganya was deposed, the UN secretary-general's spokesperson, Sylvana Foa, urged that the international community act before they saw appalling TV images of slaughter. "Unfortunately, it is not until we see babies being macheted to death on TV, that public opinion forces their governments into action," Ms. Foa appealed explicitly on one TV news programme with an air of desperation. "We do not want to see that this time."<sup>50</sup>

But what international impact did Foa's appeal have? Did international TV coverage of the massacres and coup in Burundi in late July 1996 lead to any additional and *sustainable* diplomatic effort to prevent a Rwanda-style process of mass slaughter? The answers are not encouraging for conflict prevention.

Led by the then head of the UN Peacekeeping Department, Kofi Annan, and Foa, the United Nations harnessed the media to put emotional pressure on the U.S. and other Western powers. The UN's aim was to shame them into providing the political and logistics commitment on Burundi that they had refused for Rwanda in 1994. The UN failed. "It is not possible for the U.S. to lead everywhere and in every situation," U.S. State Department spokesman Nicholas Burns responded in the face of UN appeals for at least logistics support. "We have led where we think U.S. interests require: in Haiti, and in Bosnia, and we will not hesitate to lead in future situations, where our national interests are directly and in some cases vitally affected."<sup>51</sup>

In other words, on Burundi, despite intense media coverage for a few days, the U.S. answer was "No!" Subsequent analysis and revelations following the Great Lakes crisis of late 1996 and early 1997, which led ultimately to the overthrow of President Mobutu of Zaire, have illuminated an unannounced strategic U.S. policy towards Central and East Africa that supported the Tutsi interests in the region. This ensured that U.S.-backed intervention was always considered a nonstarter.

The UN continued to warn that, after Rwanda two years earlier, history would judge the international community "rather severely" if it failed to "move very quickly before everything blows up in our faces" and mass slaughter ensued in Burundi.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, NGOs warned of a failure of international "courage" and "will," and a Burundi "steadily slipping towards genocide before our eyes."<sup>53</sup> But Western capitals prevaricated. Leading East African nations imposed economic sanctions instead of ignoring the legal technicality of Burundi's sovereignty and imposing a conflict-prevention force as they had earlier committed themselves to doing.<sup>54</sup> Burundi returned within a week to its former lowly position as barely an also-ran in the news

agenda: the same rating it had during three years of slaughter in which an estimated 150,000 people were killed.

Thus in Burundi, as elsewhere, the effect of TV coverage on focusing international political action was limited and marginal at best. It did not overcome the new international instinct of caution that is driven by negligible political will and national interest.

Two months later, in September 1996, the UN secretary-general and the United Nations Association (UNA) were reporting that the massacres continued.<sup>55</sup> In view of a high level of ethnic slaughter, the UNA asked:

Why so little international media coverage of events in Burundi? How many Burundians have to be murdered before the story becomes newsworthy? It is difficult to believe in claims that we live in an era of global communications, when none of the major TV channels appears even to have sent a camera crew to Burundi.<sup>56</sup>

## **Fear of Casualties and Likely Media Coverage: A Justifiable Anxiety?**

Fear of casualties, and the effect of media coverage of body bags on political legitimacy, seems to be a key political consideration that restrains military intervention to contain or prevent a conflict. But is the predicted emotion and fear of body bags justified by reality? Despite understandable domestic political fears, the spectre of even small numbers of casualties may not be the factor that many, especially the media, readily assume it to be.

The *prima facie* evidence from the UNPROFOR and IFOR experience in Bosnia -- especially the high number of casualties sustained by French forces -- suggests that public opinion in Europe, at least, is far more robust on the issue of casualties than many politicians instinctively fear it to be. Commanders from several nations, including those at the highest levels in U.S. forces, have expressed privately to this author their irritation with political paranoia about the possibility of casualties. They say it restrains unnecessarily their military effectiveness. After all, they argue, any military operation must plan for casualties. Political preparation of the electorate in advance, along with vigorous ministerial handling of any casualties, should be enough to prevent a major public backlash that can undermine a military deployment. The casualty issue only becomes a problem when there are weak, diffident political efforts at belated damage limitation.

After searching for other evidence of significant fluctuations in public support for U.S. peace-support operations in Lebanon and Somalia, Burk has also questioned the conventional wisdom that the public is intolerant of casualties.<sup>57</sup> He concludes that public opinion backed both operations and was "neither volatile, overly sensitive to casualties, nor obviously irresponsible," even after incidents like the deadly firefight in Mogadishu. Fear of casualties did not influence policy as many assumed it would -- especially politicians and many in the media.

In separate research, Larson<sup>58</sup> has further shown that public support for U.S. military operations and public tolerance for casualties is related directly to clear, unequivocal bipartisan political

approval for "compelling" missions. Failure to secure such agreement will inevitably lead to questioning a mission's merits. Such a situation has been highlighted uncomfortably by controversial U.S. involvement in the new generation of substate conflicts. As Larson concludes: "When political and other opinion leaders fail to agree with the President that much (or any) good is likely to come of an intervention, the public also becomes divided."

The consequences of such disagreements can be near catastrophic. According to Larson, "They can lead to enduring divisions in the public, and to support that is brittle and easily exploited by adversaries, thereby leading both to failed interventions and incorrect lessons for the future." Inevitably, the media will highlight such splits and thereby weaken the image of the policy. This author suggests that, as a result, the need for unity -- whether interstate or intrastate, and especially in the European Union (EU) -- has been seen consistently as the overriding prerequisite for policy. The best way to achieve unity is by way of a minimalist, low-risk response that has virtually no chance of preventing or halting conflict.

## **The Media and NGOs In Conflict Management**

Media involvement in conflict is further complicated by their new relationship with NGOs. NGOs have learned to harness the power of intense TV coverage of a conflict as a way to generate significant cash flows from both governments and the public, especially in the new environment of increasingly strapped financial circumstances, where generosity is squeezed and national donor agencies are retrenching.

But, at the same time, there are signs that NGOs and humanitarian organisations are belatedly coming to terms with the inherent limits and distorting influence of TV coverage on conflict management. An urgent reassessment of priorities and likely responses is taking place. "Rapid and radical shifts in the nature of international disaster response have left agencies reeling," concludes one new assessment.<sup>59</sup> In the view of one leading NGO figure, the kind of military response prompted up to now by TV coverage in particular is not the most cost-effective. Indeed, while such operations carry the kind of high profile demanded by politicians to satisfy the need to "do something," they are no longer effective or appropriate.<sup>60</sup> Impulsive intervention prompted by a conscience-driven political response to TV pictures is considered counter-productive,<sup>61</sup> despite the valuable boost it gives to fund-raising.

The massive, belated international response to the cholera catastrophe in Goma after the Rwanda genocide in 1994 seemed a worthy, correct action at the time. But the resulting Gaza-style refugee camps soon took on the air of permanent structures. They created a new crisis of fiefdoms, criminality, and social inadequacy. The intense media coverage produced Pyrrhic consequences. Governments and agencies made "ad hoc decisions that were not always in line with sound operating principles and resulted in skewed emphasis on some relief activities at the expense of others."<sup>62</sup> Two years later, in October 1996, the subsequent mass exodus of Hutu refugees during ethnic fighting in eastern Zaire became the predictable and preventable crisis foreseen by aid agencies. For two years, however, there had been no international will to act until matters took on crisis proportions with over 300,000 refugees on the move.<sup>63</sup>

For the time being, however, most NGOs continue to fight hard -- both subtly and blatantly -- to persuade TV news organisations to cover conflicts or looming catastrophes like Afghanistan, Burundi, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. They believe, or at least assume, that high-profile media coverage of a simmering crisis will prevent much worse.

Often the outcome is despair at the media's indifference or inaction.<sup>64</sup> So great is the increasing desperation of some NGOs to get worldwide attention and funding for forgotten conflicts that they tempt journalists into the conflict zones with offers of transport and logistics support. But to what effect? Do the big nations really care about Afghanistan or Liberia? Do international mediators have the kind of political or military leverage that will persuade determined warlords or substate leaders to consider peace rather than the kind of military campaign for hegemony they have long planned?

The evidence is not encouraging. The answer to both questions is likely to be "No."<sup>65</sup> Again, Burundi 1996 is a prime example. In the buildup to July, Tutsi prime minister Antoine Nduwayo expressed what many governments quietly fear: "The real problem is the ideology of genocide that has been developed for years here, as well as in Rwanda."<sup>66</sup>

It is an ideology of murder that neither leading world powers nor the media have the power to overcome. In addition, the novelty value of media coverage of conflicts that few know about or want to know about has long worn off.

## **The Unpredictable News Cycle and the Tyranny of Real Time**

It is important to understand the nature of the news cycle. Its wavelength in this age of real-time reporting from conflicts becomes ever shorter.<sup>67</sup> The consequence is that the media's attention span is diminishing proportionately.

The news cycle has a voracious appetite for new information. It shows no mercy. It is uncharitable and ungenerous. Data and video are updated and replaced rapidly. Information becomes stale more rapidly than ever, unless freshened up regularly. The absence of new details, material, or angles means an issue drops swiftly out of the news cycle, replaced by something fresher.

Witness how in July 1996 the TWA Boeing 747 disaster was soon eclipsed by Burundi. Unrest in Burundi and the subsequent coup were then relegated swiftly to virtually zero coverage by the bombing at the Atlanta Olympics. Within days, international pressure to do something about Burundi had dissipated, even though interethnic slaughter continued after the coup, and was reported.<sup>68</sup>

*Prima facie*, vivid coverage will only create major national political resonance if, by chance, it hits a critical, often unpredictable void in the news cycle. News editors have to search constantly for a new story that departs significantly from what has become a stale news story, whether domestic or international. A lull in the news cycle, often reinforced during vacation time when

politicians are away from their legislatures, can also mean that there is no home political story to compete with international news. Resources, personnel, and satellite dishes can then be deployed abroad, but selectively and only if media organisations see the chance for high-profile editorial impact. Hence the fickle nature of the media.

One of the most powerful examples of this random impact of coverage was the chance TV story transmitted by the BBC in late July 1993. The timing coincided with the start of midyear vacations worldwide, when the news cycle is slow. The item reported the plight of Irma, a young girl in Sarajevo who had been severely paralysed by shrapnel lodged in her brain. Many other children had been similarly maimed. But because of the international news vacuum at the time, Irma's plight grabbed emotive media attention worldwide. The media clamour created public-opinion pressure, forcing the British prime minister to mount an airlift, primarily to evacuate Irma, with intense media attention.<sup>69</sup>

Hardened correspondents like Martin Bell, who had witnessed much worse in Bosnia, were astonished by the British government's response. "That the BBC on that Tuesday should devote more than half of one of its main news programmes to the plight of a single five-year-old girl struck me as daft," Bell wrote. "I felt like a humble foot soldier in an army whose high command had taken leave of its senses."<sup>70</sup>

This example underlines how timing and chance are crucial. It is impossible for an aspiring "conflict preventer" to predict with any accuracy when these factors will converge. Often the relentless news cycle and the pressure of vivid domestic issues will conspire to prevent a pending conflict from making an impact as a lead or close-to-lead story to which ministers, civil servants, or the public will respond. For governments with little interest in making a more positive engagement in a conflict, it seems that media indifference is an increasingly convenient alibi for doing as little as possible.

Alternatively, diplomats, military officers, or civilians must live with the expectation that at some time they will wake up with "big bruises" inflicted by emotive TV coverage that unexpectedly creates strong public emotions and resonance without warning.<sup>71</sup> At other times, nothing will happen.

Two examples of a direct cause and effect are the postconflict predicament of Kurdish refugees driven from Iraq to southern Turkey after the Gulf War in early 1991 and the Bosnian Moslems herded into Srebrenica in April 1993. In both cases emotional TV coverage did have a profound political impact.<sup>72</sup> By comparison, in Rwanda and the early weeks of the unfolding conflict in the former Yugoslavia, TV coverage did not have an impact.

## **Northern Iraq and Southern Turkey, 1991**

In February 1991, having won the Gulf War, the Western allies had not even begun to contemplate what possible revenge Saddam Hussein might exact on oppressed ethnic groups like the Shias and Kurds. His Iraqi army forced tens of thousands of Kurds into the freezing mountains of southern Turkey. Their plight would have remained unseen by the outside world had the Turkish government not made the rare concession of allowing TV satellite dishes into

border mountains usually closed to outsiders. The resulting heartrending TV images of the squalor, mud, and death were key factors in moving Western leaders to set up an urgent humanitarian mission, and ultimately the military protection of Operation Provide Comfort.<sup>73</sup> It can be argued that this operation has prevented renewed conflict and slaughter in northern Iraq.

### **Srebrenica, 1993**

Similarly, in April 1993, the Hi-8 video images, taken by a single freelance cameraman of General Morrillon pledging to save the encircled Moslem population of Srebrenica, were a key factor in persuading the UN Security Council to set up Safe Areas. France, the U.S., and the United Kingdom objected. They said the safe-area concept was a bad precedent to set and a bad principle to adopt.

But the emotional impact of the TV images on nations holding rotating seats in the Security Council overcame the powerful political objections of the three nations with permanent seats. The less powerful, nonaligned nations, without the benefit of extensive resources for intelligence gathering and analysis, relied to a great extent on the emotional power of the TV images. As a result, the Safe Area was authorised by Security Council resolution, even though the Venezuelan president of the council, Diego Arria, admitted to this author in 1994: "I did not know that what we were creating was a trap."<sup>74</sup> The nature of the fall of Srebrenica in July 1995, and the consequent mass slaughter of fleeing Moslem men, justified Dr. Arria's belated forebodings.

### **Rwanda, 1994**

TV pictures showing the slaughter of at least half a million Rwandans between April and July 1994 produced the opposite political response. Horrifying, intermittent TV images of people being hacked to death and piles of bodies and cadavers floating down rivers shocked ministers of major Western governments. The kind of "true heart of darkness" emotions, referred to by Foreign Secretary Hurd, pricked diplomatic consciences fleetingly. But they did not lead to any *major or fundamental* policy change, even though senior officials, especially in the U.S. government, like to believe that they did. The international community virtually ignored the terror of Rwanda, just as it chose to overlook a series of apocalyptic warnings via the UN and NGOs in late 1993 and early 1994.<sup>75</sup> It refused even to provide aircraft to transport the 5,500 peacekeepers eventually pledged to the UN early in the post-April 1994 bloodletting.

After the images of dead Rwandan cholera victims being tipped into pits in Goma, the resulting humanitarian operation can be construed as a calculated palliative. It was as much a public relations show as a way to provide substantive aid. Especially in the U.S. case, it was high-profile, low risk, very visible, and conceived for maximum media impact so that the public would conclude that "something is being done." Yet it can be argued that the response was not the most appropriate.<sup>76</sup> Decisions subsequently taken were often misguided, having been too influenced by skewed media coverage.<sup>77</sup> Military commitments and the high-profile interest were soon scaled down once the media interest died. The Great Lakes crisis of November 1996 was as much due to the highly inappropriate response in July 1994 that created vast, permanent camps for "refugees," many of whom had committed genocide.

As in so many cases, TV coverage of the Rwanda carnage before Goma made no difference until it was too late, and then it distorted the picture of what was really happening.<sup>78</sup> In Rwanda, hate radio -- Radio Mille Collines -- had systematically laid the groundwork for mass slaughter from the moment it was licensed in July 1993.<sup>79</sup> On the buildup to the Rwanda genocide, it must be concluded that the media were unbriefed, ill-informed, ill-prepared, and therefore unaware of what might be looming. On the other hand, NGOs, the UN and, therefore, leading world powers, all had access to early warning signs.<sup>80</sup> But in some cases they failed to understand them, and in others, governments and the UN actively suppressed them.<sup>81</sup>

### **Former Yugoslavia, Late 1980 -- 1991**

Similarly, in the former Yugoslavia, there were plenty of signals in the official media during the late 1980s and the period 1990 -- 91 of Serb strategic intentions.<sup>82</sup> The media's incitement of hatred is well documented.<sup>83</sup> At some level, foreign governments noted the signals, but by either design or default, they chose to do nothing. These governments must not be allowed to get away with the claim that they did not know.<sup>84</sup>

## **Is Media Coverage A *Sine Qua Non* for Conflict Prevention?**

There may be a strong argument that media coverage is counterproductive for effective diplomacy aimed at conflict prevention or management. Too often during discussions or negotiations, the protagonists or delegations perform somewhat theatrically for the press corps, thereby apparently stiffening their positions and compounding the problems of mediation or confidence building.

In late 1995, one exceptional BBC TV documentary by Michael Ignatieff on the work of the UN secretary-general included a unique insight into the effectiveness of unseen diplomacy by the UN special representative in Burundi, Ould Abdullah. Abdullah's limited effectiveness was partly due to the absence of any media coverage that can inflame tensions and polarise positions rather than assist in conciliation.

Although journalists want a story, the wiser, more seasoned conflict journalists recognise that unseen mediation and diplomacy can play a more pivotal role than -- and even be complicated by -- public posturing to the media. Witness the frustrations of David Owen, Cyrus Vance, and others in the protracted Bosnian negotiations in Geneva, where the faction leaders indulged in public posturing at the microphones in the Palais des Nations before and after each session of "peace talks."<sup>85</sup>

Ignatieff's film of Burundi also highlighted the limits and frustrations of quiet, unheralded, unobtrusive mediation. Therefore, rather than hindering mediation, it could also be argued that increased media coverage might have helped focus international concern on Burundi,<sup>86</sup> thereby attaining a sustainable momentum and mediation-support mechanism. The contention is

debatable and possibly hypothetical. Because of the international lack of interest in Burundi, the media coverage never happened.

Eventually Abdullah asked to be relieved of his position because of his despair at the lack of political support and resources for his work. In no way had the media put Burundi on the governmental radar screen, and by April 1996 the warning signals had apparently come full circle. It seemed to be the autumn of 1993 revisited.

Then, to the delight and surprise of many conflict analysts, some governments expressed concern and even tried to do more. In a move apparently at odds with clear international indifference towards Africa's festering conflicts,<sup>87</sup> the U.S. government proposed a UN preventative force whose aim would be to stop Burundi from turning into another Rwanda-style mass genocide. Two months before the murders and coup that fleetingly put Burundi on the world's TV screens, U.S. ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright preemptively described Burundi as "a car driving in slow motion over a cliff."<sup>88</sup> She chided France for vetoing a plan reportedly backed by President Clinton to prepare a UN rapid-intervention force for Burundi.

Even allowing for the complex political undercurrents between the U.S. and France, the prevention plan was unique and praiseworthy. Why the sudden U.S. interest to do in Burundi what it conspicuously refused to do in Rwanda in 1994? In no way can it be said that media coverage was the reason. Diplomacy was taking a lead politically. On Burundi's catastrophe the international print press and TV had been virtually silent, despite a virtually constant level of killings and the many warnings in NGO reports of increasing violence reminiscent of Rwanda before April 1994.

Again, no obvious cause and effect between media coverage and diplomatic action can be detected. In Burundi in early summer 1996, it was the opposite.

## **Western News Media and Conflict: The New Commercial Realities**

It is misguided for diplomats, the military, and NGOs to view the "media" as a single, homogeneous grouping of journalists and broadcasters who act in a predictable, uniform way. The media are neither monolithic or homogeneous. They are a diverse, highly competitive, unpredictable lot.

Except in the most cataclysmic events -- like an air crash, a disaster with high levels of instant death, or a political upheaval -- there is no automaticity to a uniform, international news response. Indeed, the response of news organisations at all levels has become increasingly variable and unpredictable.

Treatment of stories will vary according to national and regional agendas. A crisis in one part of the world can easily be viewed elsewhere as irrelevant. The level of coverage (or refusal to cover) will often be a function of national interest and distance from the event. The lower the national interest and the greater the distance, the less likely it is that news organisations will have

anything more than a passing interest in the developing story. There is no uniform media response that defies international borders and national identities.

Responses to conflicts depend on considerations like editorial perceptions, the nationalities of those fighting and the forces being engaged to stop them, calculations about the interests of their audiences, and cash- availability in the news organisation. Gatekeeping theory has narrowed the media trends in conflicts that are a fickle and nationalistic process.<sup>89</sup>

Henceforth, commercial pressures are likely to predominate. The overriding pressures for budget discipline in media operations will be a harsh reality that cannot be overstated. Conflicts that explode at a moment of overspending or budget-stretching in a news organisation are unlikely to receive firsthand coverage, however pressing the threat. As the sharp drop in media coverage of IFOR's military success in Bosnia illustrated during 1996, coverage of "unsexy" nation building<sup>90</sup> and development projects,<sup>91</sup> or the kind of economic regeneration efforts required to avoid conflict,<sup>92</sup> is likely to be negligible at best.

None of these factors offers any comfort to those working to improve international awareness of conflicts to be prevented or resolved. The outlook is increasingly gloomy. U.S. State Department spokesman Burns has publicly acknowledged a trend that other insiders are less willing to express candidly. From his perspective of promoting and explaining U.S. foreign policy, Burns has described what is now a "sorry minimum of foreign coverage, reflecting current prevailing public attitudes," especially on U.S. TV news networks.<sup>93</sup> The European Union's Commissioner for Humanitarian Affairs, Emma Bonino, has expressed the new challenge in more caustic terms:

What does it take for a humanitarian crisis to make it into prime time slots on radio or television? Deaths are essential, preferably hundreds of them in places that have not captured media attention before. News is by definition new. . . . I became aware that for every humanitarian crisis that made it into the headlines, there were dozens that went unnoticed.<sup>94</sup>

One reason above all else generates such pressure: The information and media business is experiencing a technological and commercial revolution of seismic proportions. The revolution's ultimate direction cannot be predicted, but current signs indicate that it will disturb the business of conflict prevention. The ultimate paradox will result: there will be increasing and overwhelming volumes of information, but less interest in harnessing the information commercially unless a profitable revenue stream can be generated.

The conflict between journalistic instincts and commercial realities in the increasingly tough information marketplace will be profound. The relentless push for news that entertains ("infotainment") seems unstoppable, with a trend towards the "trivial and mediocre"<sup>95</sup> and news that is predominantly domestic with scant reflection of foreign crises.<sup>96</sup>

The leading journalists and producers at the 1996 awards ceremony of the One World Broadcasting Trust were warned of the "danger of apartheid of the communications world"<sup>97</sup> between media coverage of developed and the developing world. The audience was then presented starkly with a new challenge: "We [as broadcast journalists] can raise consciousness or retreat."<sup>98</sup>

Many fear that commercial realities have already forced the retreat. "Television and radio coverage of humanitarian issues outside the main news bulletins is dwindling throughout Europe," EU commissioner Bonino has concluded. "The sidelining of documentary and current affairs programs about humanitarian issues is also due to lack of interest among the owners and directors of broadcasting companies."<sup>99</sup>

On the positive side are programmes like *Channel Four News* from Independent Television News (ITN) in London and the output of quasi state-funded broadcasters like the BBC and the two German channels, ARD and ZDF. They are proud to retain a significant news-gathering infrastructure worldwide. (The BBC, for example, retains a network of about 250 correspondents in 42 foreign bureaus.) The aim remains to broadcast comprehensive news, current affairs, and documentary coverage worldwide. The journalistic mission is still to cover international issues and conflicts, even for high-profile, low-audience programmes that the commercial sector considers too marginal to support.<sup>100</sup> However, audience shares are falling, with increasingly fragmented and transient viewing patterns across a fast-increasing proliferation of channels. Cash remains a constraint, but not because of any threat to profits. The real value of licence fees and state revenues is being cut. We must therefore ask what political impact such programmes can really be expected to have unless there is a resulting rare public outcry about a conflict that the politicians cannot dare ignore. The chances of this happening are low, and probably negligible.

On the negative side, are the new commercial realities. Much to the regret of many (though not all) journalists, their editorial instincts to cover a conflict are increasingly being heavily constrained by the ever-tougher conditions in the media marketplace.<sup>101</sup> For commercial TV news organisations, the ratings or circulation figures produce revenue. The conventional industry view is that coverage of domestic issues will buoy up flagging sales and public interest, even though advertising agencies say well-researched documentaries, including those covering international issues, generate good revenue streams.<sup>102</sup> The typical commercial view, however, is that only in exceptional circumstances will coverage of an international crisis raise circulation or viewing numbers. Coverage by way of news or documentary is therefore increasingly rare.<sup>103</sup>

In addition, the new data and news software embraced by information technology has an ominous potential power to distort the integrity of information. The Internet and multimedia products like CD-ROM are in the infant stages of challenging the monopoly of news organisations to disseminate "news." It seems likely that they will further fragment the market in a way yet to be charted accurately. The proliferation of unchecked and uncorroborated "facts" circulating in cyberspace may also serve to distort the perception of conflicts. When reading a newspaper or watching most TV news programmes, the average reader or viewer assumes that the output has been checked and verified by editors and skilled journalists. In the future, with unfiltered Internet access to cyberspace, the typical consumer is unlikely to have the skill to discriminate between "facts" and carefully disguised propaganda or polemics circulating freely under the likely guise of independently verified "facts."

Meanwhile, on the commercial side, information technology is slicing the market into ever-smaller portions. As a result, revenue at the marginal end of each market is being cut. To preserve profit, newspaper and broadcast groups have to drive costs down. Thus the high costs (and risks) of committing editorial manpower to a conflict in a distant country in which there is

no national interest to become involved will increasingly militate against conflict coverage. In mainstream daily journalism, senior editors and managers have been heard to say: "If we don't cover it, no one will know the difference, so let's not bother."

As a result, for both text and video reporting of conflict, the international news and video agencies like Reuters, the Associated Press, and Worldwide Television News (WTN) have become the conscience of many (though not all) large broadcast and newspaper organisations. The agencies provide the words and pictures for a fixed annual contract price. This satisfies the accountants because it ensures that there are no financial surprises. Editorially, it ensures rapid, real-time coverage of a story well before a correspondent and crew can be scrambled and sent to the airport, at a considerable extra cost. The agency material is assembled at base in either a TV edit room or on a journalist's video display. In this way, above-the-line costs of such coverage are rock bottom, if not negligible. A degree of editorial honour can be retained, allowing editors to claim correctly: "But we covered the story."

To the purist, the sight of a company's own correspondent *in situ* is what field reporting of conflicts is all about. But for many organisations, the cost of securing that image and presence is disproportionate and of questionable value. No great compensatory revenue is generated. Regrettably, most viewers and readers cannot tell the difference between a company's experienced correspondent on the spot and a cheaper (though not always) credible journalist sitting in a head office merging text and images into a convincing, if not always accurate, package. To reduce costs and preserve profits, the commercial news organisations are prepared to risk the disaffection of the handful of readers or viewers who notice the difference, along with any errors in interpretation of the second-hand information. The risk is more than offset by the big saving made by not dispatching the company's own staff and resources. The bottom line is that having a named, recognised journalist on location increasingly carries a high marginal cost that many news organisations will not pay.

Naturally, many editors will reject indignantly this kind of analysis as inaccurate or unduly cynical. In many countries, news organisations remain answerable to regulators or oversight boards which continue to insist on extensive coverage of international news, which invariably means conflicts. The regulators have the power to censure those organisations who fail to live up to their mandates. By and large, however, the impression is one of public praise for foreign reporting by news companies, even those claimed by some critics to be falling short of their international news coverage responsibilities.<sup>104</sup>

However, insiders in some news organisations are not convinced. Journalists detect a carefully crafted editorial sleight of hand designed to give the impression of a greater commitment to on-the-spot foreign coverage than is actually the case. Sceptics even claim that many editors will only assign a reporter to "bang-bang" or big "death-and-destruction" foreign stories if there is a good chance of coverage that will win high-profile awards. These enhance the organisation's prestige and image as a committed provider of foreign news when the reality is somewhat more questionable. As a result, crises that break closer to the deadline for award submissions (usually towards the end of a calendar year) have a better chance of being covered than those that break near the start of the award-year cycle. After all, awards are about marketing and securing a position in the market. Newspaper readers and TV news audiences like to feel part of a success.

This is the new reality. There is no point taking a moral view and expecting matters to change. It is virtually impossible to see how they can. A yearning for the plentiful days of international coverage in the late 1980s and early 1990s is now only for nostalgic dreamers.<sup>105</sup> Hence, the warning about the "danger of apartheid in the communications world" is pivotal, as is the new dilemma: "to raise consciousness, or retreat."<sup>106</sup> Now the dominant question in deciding whether to commit increasingly scarce resources to a conflict tends to be: "What's the *value added* by going there ourselves?" Often the answer is: "Nothing worth paying for."

## **Real-Time Technology and Conflict Coverage: The Ominous Paradox**

The developed world has more real-time technology and capability than it has ever had to cover crises and conflicts in the developing world. The contrast with the timescale of conflict reporting, say, 50 years ago, is profound. Notebooks and pencils<sup>107</sup> have been replaced by laptop computers with modems and communication cards that can transmit instantly by satellite phone. News organisations have highly mobile satellite TV transmission systems that can broadcast from anywhere. TV news pictures can now be broadcast on telephone lines, albeit slowly and not in real time.<sup>108</sup> Journalists from the richer news organisations travel with satellite telephones the size of a briefcase. There is more ability, mobility, and technology to cover and beam back more substate horrors in this world.

As a result, TV news coverage suffers from what this author has christened a "supermarket of war video."<sup>109</sup> The proliferation of Hi-8 video cameras (small, highly portable, and easily hidden) and a new generation of low-cost digital video (DVC) hand cameras, means that the information no longer has to be provided by expensive professional sources.<sup>110</sup>

From a matrix of incoming video on their desktop video-screens, journalists in a TV newsroom can pick and choose, just like walking down the supermarket aisles: One day, Nagorno-Karabakh, the next day, Tajikistan, Georgia, Chechnya, or Afghanistan, then a bit of Angola, Liberia, Yemen, or perhaps Algeria, if we are lucky. On many days, all of this streams relentlessly into the TV news machines from agencies. The task of filtering it all quickly is mind-boggling, given the mass of video and the short time usually available.

As news organisations and audiences become more domestically oriented<sup>111</sup> (or is it numbed and dulled to the misery of people in whom they have no interest?<sup>112</sup>), there is also growing evidence of an inverse relationship between the wealth of raw TV coverage and how much of it is actually transmitted as anything more than a few seconds of subliminal video with no context or detail. There is more video available from more conflicts but less editorial interest in transmitting it, except on specialist, non -- mass market programmes like *Channel 4 News* in the UK or the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer* on PBS and Ted Koppel's *Nightline* on ABC in the U.S.

Although not yet proven conclusively, there may be a further ominous trend. Technology has facilitated the globalisation of the news business. In TV, international news channels like CNN, BBC World, and NBC Superchannel are lined up for battle on what this author has labeled the new Wild West broadcasting frontier via satellite and cable. In theory, this situation should allow

comprehensive coverage of global issues. Again, in theory, this coverage should include early warning of conflicts and any efforts at prevention, along with detailed reporting of conflicts that have erupted in defiance of all diplomatic efforts (assuming there were some!).

However, with the explosion of media outlets wiring the world, information technology experts believe we may now be experiencing an unexpected phenomenon, namely, that except for the elites, *globalisation promotes greater parochialisation* in public perceptions and interests.<sup>[113](#)</sup> If correct, this is likely to further limit media coverage of conflicts.

## Partiality In Conflict Reporting: The Media's Secret Shame?

The report recommends that the media conducts its [*sic*] own self-critical evaluation of the adequacy and impartiality of its reporting of complex emergencies in the developing world, and that they draw lessons for more responsible reporting [The Steering Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda].<sup>[114](#)</sup>

There is one cancer above all that afflicts much of the reporting from wars and conflict. It is the virtually unspoken issue of partiality and bias in conflict journalism. The mere mention of it is usually seen as taboo and even heretic.

Few media people want to discuss partiality and the resulting distortions. To do so would undermine the perceived integrity and objectivity of correspondents who report from battle zones. It would also challenge the motives of the organisations that print and broadcast their material in the name of objectivity and balance.

In Bosnia, above all, there is more evidence than many media personnel care to admit that journalists embarked on crusades and became partial.<sup>[115](#)</sup> They empathised with the Bosnian government because of personal outrage at Serb aggression. *Prima facie*, this partiality distorted the reporting and led either to a refusal to include certain qualifying facts in stories or to distorting the overall impression.

In Rwanda, misreporting stemmed from both the emotions created

by the number of deaths and a misunderstanding of what was happening.<sup>[116](#)</sup> The complexities of Rwanda's social structure of Hutus and Tutsis could never be translated adequately by the media, especially by TV news, in a simple, understandable, presentable form.<sup>[117](#)</sup> As the Rwanda Steering Committee report makes clear: "Inadequate and inaccurate reporting by international media on the genocide itself contributed to international indifference and inaction."<sup>[118](#)</sup>

It is dangerous to generalise. There are reporters who cover conflicts at great personal risk and with the greatest degree of objectivity they can muster, especially given the often miserable conditions in which they find themselves. It is also professionally risky for a senior journalist to cast aspersions on the integrity of some fellow journalists' work. A few journalists have made great efforts to investigate and refute allegations of misreporting by news correspondents and misrepresentation by the UN military.<sup>[119](#)</sup>

But in Bosnia, there is compelling evidence that coverage has been skewed due to both the personal emotions of correspondents and the corporate policies of some leading news organisations. Under the apparent veil of objectivity, they have taken sides, often unashamedly. Coverage has not been balanced, yet no "health warning" or personal declaration has accompanied the coverage. As the BBC's TV correspondent Mark Urban wrote: "Few of the British-employed journalists -- with some exceptions -- seem to have been concerned with telling us the tales of the Serbian housewives blown away by Muslim snipers' bullets, or the Croat villagers whose throats were slit by the Muslim raiders from nearby villages in central Bosnia."<sup>120</sup> What could be called the hypocrisy of governments -- especially of the U.S. -- has reinforced this cancer, along with a trend towards what might qualify as deceit.

A former senior U.S. commander in Europe, General Charles G. Boyd, has written a remarkable exposé<sup>121</sup> of the true perception of the Bosnian conflict by many U.S. officers.<sup>122</sup> The retired general's decision to go public is rare. His view directly contradicts the conventional political wisdom in Washington, which Boyd concludes was "stunted by a limited understanding of current events as well as a tragic ignorance or disregard for history." In his damning indictment Boyd adds *inter alia*, "Most damaging of all, U.S. actions in the Balkans have been at sharp variance with stated U.S. policy . . . We must see things in the Balkans as they are, not as we wish them to be. We must separate reality from image."

The same complaint, nay accusation, may be leveled at some correspondents and news organisations who, for whatever reason, willingly became party to this misrepresentation. Would that some would come clean, even retrospectively, in the way a senior general such as Boyd has chosen to. "Above all, we need to tell the truth, if only to ourselves," Boyd holds, especially when it comes to the misrepresentation of Sarajevo as a city under siege.<sup>123</sup>

Boyd focuses on the politicians and establishment who, by intention or by default, went along with the conventional myths. In theory, a free and independent press should have been able to challenge and dispel the establishment's myths by way of its on-the-ground reporting. By and large, the media failed and instead reinforced the myths.

Many military and civilian members of the NATO/UN operations who privately belong to the Boyd school of disillusionment have become increasingly angry with the media performance they witnessed.<sup>124</sup> Even if we allow for an instinctive institutional antipathy towards the media, the kind of complaints expressed by a pseudonymous UN official in Sarajevo, "Kenneth Roberts," deserve detailed and serious attention.<sup>125</sup> With evident bitterness, Roberts complained, for example, of the deceptive picture of Sarajevo portrayed by the media. People were not starving, he said. The city was neither besieged nor isolated; otherwise how would the markets be so well stocked -- at a price? Like others, Roberts alleged that "crusading" journalists succumbed to clever and ruthless Bosnian government tactics designed to ensure that the image of suffering Moslems was not undermined. In a broadside aimed at all media representatives in Bosnia, Roberts alleged manipulation and said: "CNN ought first to ensure that it is presenting the actual facts. But instant reporting precludes analysis and verification." He concluded by asking, as many nonjournalists do, why there is no regulatory media body to exact sanctions on journalists who fail to report objectively.

For the time being, discussion of this issue is best confined to published remarks by journalists and other media experts. To venture further may be potentially litigious. It must also be made clear that this author sees no shame in reporters who, having endured unspeakable horrors alongside fellow human beings, align their emotions and resentments with these victims and then write vividly about them.

However, in the complex dynamics and politics of conflict prevention and management, the reader or audience must be made aware of the level of partiality of a particular journalist or news organisation. Distorted reporting gives the wrong impression. For any reader or viewer to understand the complexities of a conflict, accurate and balanced journalism is required. To provide anything else can be considered a deceit. Yet it is virtually unheard of for such a declaration of partiality to be made. Martin Bell's explanation of the emotional pressures, and latterly his call for a "journalism of attachment," was a rare admission. "All the reporters who work regularly on the Bosnian beat are, at least privately, interventionist," he wrote. "Surrounded by so much misery and destruction, it is humanly difficult to be anything else."<sup>126</sup>

But how many of them made explicitly clear their personal views? Almost none; to have done so would probably have led to censure by their employers.

CNN's Christiane Amanpour exemplified gritty, gutsy, emotive reporting from the Bosnian horrors in Sarajevo and beyond. Her presentations and live two-way broadcasts helped to keep Bosnia a major issue on U.S. TV news. She underscored the tragedy of the Bosnian Moslems. On a live satellite link between Atlanta and Sarajevo, she challenged President Clinton for a perceived "flip-flop" on policy to Bosnia.<sup>127</sup> For staying in Bosnia, even with diversions to Rwanda and Haiti, Amanpour became renowned as the "Queen of the Sarajevo press corps."<sup>128</sup> But what about her style of journalism? In the view of one similarly distinguished and battle-scarred fellow journalist, Amanpour was "renowned for her defiance of bland 'neutrality' in the coverage of genocide."<sup>129</sup> General Boyd complains that "Serbian people have suffered when hostile forces have advanced, with little interest or condemnation by Washington or CNN correspondent Christiane Amanpour."<sup>130</sup>

Amanpour believes that she "told it like it was." She gives a robust response to those who allege that she was not neutral. "Whoa . . . It drives me crazy when this neutrality thing comes up," she is quoted as telling an interviewer. "Objectivity, that great journalistic buzzword, means giving all sides a fair hearing -- not treating all sides the same -- particularly when all sides are not the same. When you are in a situation like Bosnia, you are an accomplice -- an accomplice to genocide."<sup>131</sup>

Roy Gutman won a Pulitzer Prize for his revelations in July 1992 about Serb detention camps. He has talked openly about the emotional difficulties of retaining the total objectivity that most people expect of a senior journalist. "Some issues simply are not equally balanced, and we can't give the impression that for every argument on one side, there is an equal one on the other," he said in a discussion of his own shift from objectivity during his reporting of Bosnia. "I do not believe the fairness doctrine applies equally to victims and perpetrators."<sup>132</sup>

Although claiming the high moral ground, few reporters or media corporations have openly declared their partiality in the way the *Guardian*'s award-winning war correspondent Ed Vulliamy was willing to do in 1994.<sup>133</sup> In no way did Vulliamy's honesty undermine his journalism. Rather, it made his writing more powerful because of his close affinity with the Moslems, a closeness born out of experiencing fear, horrors, deprivation and near death alongside them.

Would that others in the journalistic profession had matched Vulliamy's reasoned openness. As he says himself, he tried to be impartial in Croatia. In Bosnia he found it impossible to hold the line. "I am one of those reporters who cannot see this as 'just another story' from which I must remain detached, and in which I must be neutral," he wrote.<sup>134</sup> "I think that if I did require myself to be neutral, I would not understand the war." He harboured contempt for the "peace brokers and the men with clipboards who make cursory visits and treat the aggressors and victims as equals." Like Amanpour, Vulliamy's commitment and disdain is absolute. "These officials should please the 'neutrals' in journalism -- for they are the incarnation of the appeasers of 1938."

The trouble is that such emotive journalistic commitment was neatly exploited, especially by the Bosnian government. Ministers in Sarajevo ruthlessly harnessed such partiality to generate international sympathy for the government's fight against "fascism." It was a deft manipulation to which many journalists succumbed, either willingly or, more typically, without realising it. In the words of former EU mediator Lord Owen, the Bosnian government strategy, masterminded by Vice President Ejup Ganic, was "very credible but ruthless."<sup>135</sup> Its influence was "too often underrated." Backed by public relations techniques honed in the United States, the Sarajevo government manipulated many of the international press who, like the Bosnian population, were enduring Serb shelling and a degree of danger and deprivation.

Bosnian government ministers and spokesmen were always ready to comment or rush to the live satellite dishes to condemn the Serbs. They usually enjoyed a free ride, their increasingly exaggerated claims accepted as fact by callow interviewers and anchors in distant studios who did not have the knowledge or background briefings to know better. Frequently, Bosnian ministers made unsubstantiated claims that were untrue or grossly exaggerated. UN military personnel knew that the claims were untrue,<sup>136</sup> but they were either forbidden or restrained from going public with the alternative version. Rarely were the Bosnian ministers and officials challenged, for example, about their policy of refusing to allow those of Sarajevo's population to leave who wanted to do so, or their claim that Sarajevans were starving,<sup>137</sup> or their military policy of taunting Serb artillery with futile infantry attacks in order to incite Serb shelling,<sup>138</sup> or their exaggeration of the predicament of the Bosnian population in Bihac and Gorazde.<sup>139</sup>

Few, if any, journalists or news organisations sympathetic to the Bosnian position gave any public signal of the level of manipulation that they were being subjected to. Yet each day this kind of manipulation was skewing their news coverage, and with it the impression of the war abroad, especially among opinion leaders and journalistic elites on the east coast of the U.S.

There is evidence that leading U.S. newspapers, and TV news in particular, had scant interest in running stories that did not fit a clear editorial line on Bosnia. They indulged in a pro-Bosnian

Moslem campaign without openly declaring it, and the journalism was skewed unashamedly to serve that agenda. No one can deny any media organisation the right to campaign for the "white hats" (Bosnian Moslems) against the "black hats" (the Serbs). But it can be argued that such "reporting" should not be allowed to masquerade as balanced, objective journalism.

Organisations gloried in Pulitzers and the baubles earned by prizewinning journalism. The impression was of a new generation of journalism's finest hours. But the record is less complimentary. Journalism suffered. The high ideals espoused by media organisations were quietly set to one side.

This theme was taken up in a heavily criticised 1993 article in *Foreign Policy* entitled "Dateline Yugoslavia: The Partisan Press."<sup>140</sup> It detailed how, by late 1992, the majority of the media had become "so mesmerised by their focus on Serb aggression" that any principle of balance and objectivity evaporated.

Shock waves from the article reverberated speedily through the U.S. media establishment. The veracity of the argument was quickly destroyed by scathing attacks on author Peter Brock for alleged inaccuracies in some of the data he used.<sup>141</sup> Brock's critics, for example, Charles Lane, agreed that there "is legitimate room for self-examination by the press about its performance in the supercharged Bosnian ethnic atmosphere."<sup>142</sup> But they demolished some of the author's argument by questioning his analytical methods. As a result, the integrity of Brock's core argument about the partisanship of the foreign media in former Yugoslavia was swiftly undermined. The discussion withered and died quickly.

Yet Brock's main thrust remains just as relevant today, if not more so, as the pointed analysis by General Boyd proves.<sup>143</sup> Most telling of all is the fact that Boyd's criticism comes from a senior military figure. Had the criticism been written by a journalist, it probably would have been swiftly rejected and partially discredited, just as Brock's was. Boyd's expression of concern, however, was subject to similar criticism and questioning in a later issue of *Foreign Affairs*.<sup>144</sup>

This author has gathered evidence from journalists that illustrates the determination of some media organisations to peddle one line to the exclusion of other evidence in a conflict that might undermine the line. One senior correspondent has described how "balanced journalism has gone out of the window" because of what he calls a "tyranny of victimology."<sup>145</sup> Some of the difficulty of persuading U.S. media organisations in particular to take a more balanced and less partial approach to a conflict like Bosnia is revealed fleetingly by David Owen in his book *Balkan Odyssey*. He describes an "explosive encounter" with the editorial board of the *New York Times* when he tried to impart to them some of the realities of Bosnia, including the fact that often the Bosnians were as deceitful and evil as the Serbs.<sup>146</sup>

However, the overall mind-set and editorial views of almost the entire journalistic elite, especially in the U.S., did not change. For example, the Sarajevo market massacre on 5 February 1994 was instantly assumed to be the work of Serb artillery firing from the surrounding mountains. Without any question, the media swiftly reflected the conventional belief that Serb gunners were responsible for the outrage.<sup>147</sup> However, a series of subsequent crater analyses by UNPROFOR ballistics experts from several different nations concluded otherwise. On a clear balance of probabilities, all evidence pointed to the fatal mortar being fired by Bosnian forces, as

quickly became apparent in Sarajevo.<sup>148</sup> A finding to this effect was made public on 16 February, but the international press ignored it<sup>149</sup> because it did not fit the conventional wisdom.

The evidence has been related to this author, who has also been assured that a full report sits in the chancelleries of the main Western capitals. Senior officials have described how, at the time, it would have been "politically unhelpful" to have undermined the case against the Serbs. Similar evidence was gathered by David Binder of the *New York Times*. The newspaper, however, declined to run the story. Instead, some six months after assembling the data, Binder published his own findings for a limited, elite readership in *Foreign Policy*.<sup>150</sup> The overall media lesson learned by those grappling with the challenge of preventing conflict is therefore disturbing: Do not trust either the line or the coverage.

Two further questions must be asked: Is the journalist partial? What information might he or she have omitted? Regrettably, the answers are unlikely to be encouraging.

## **The Media and Conflict: A Synergy For Prevention?**

The tone of this diagnostic paper has been pessimistic. Yet even the mention of "synergy" conjures up the prospect, or at least possibility, of some kind of mutually complementary relationship.

Synergy is a medical concept. It may be defined as "combined or correlated action of a group of bodily organs," like nerve centers or muscles.<sup>151</sup> It could be said that the media function as both a nerve center and a muscle when it comes to the dynamics of conflict, and the international perceptions thereof.

This paper has been drafted at a time when voices in the international community have been comparing the developing science of conflict prevention to that of preventive medicine. For example, in a recent speech on preventive defence, then U.S. defence secretary Perry detailed how, in the same way that "preventive medicine creates the conditions which support health, making disease less likely and surgery unnecessary," it can be said that "preventive defence creates the conditions which support peace, making war less likely and deterrence unnecessary."<sup>152</sup>

The medical analogy is a potent comparison taken up elsewhere by Lord Owen.<sup>153</sup> Less optimistically, Owen, as a former doctor, outlined how the vast bulk of modern illness is not cured, but alleviated by the doctor's skills . . . . The dramatic cure is the exception rather than the rule. . . . Much the same limitation affects politicians dealing with conflict within a nation or internationally. Violence is part of daily living. We can deplore its existence, but we are not likely to root it out from our diverse societies. This author shares Lord Owen's conclusion that both doctor and politician "have to accept, albeit with resignation, the limitations imposed by the structures in which they operate: the human body and the body politic."

The question is where do the media fit in to this illness and/or curative process? The media transmit information, but does the information help prevent the slide into violent conflict? When a patient informs a doctor of symptoms of an unknown condition, does that information mean

that the doctor can either prevent deterioration from the illness or cure it? Or is that condition essentially incurable?

If the limited medical analogy is sustainable, then the measured caution and pessimism of this author's analysis remains justified. It seems that beyond the mere fact of reporting conflict, or signs pointing to a looming conflict, the media have significant limits on their influence. The same is true for big governments in the developed world. Beyond a certain point, they are powerless to prevent a conflict that at least one potential belligerent is determined to start and see through to its awful, premeditated end.

## A Sobering Final Thought

Even in the face of the often (though not always) pressing demands of the media, diplomats and government officials point without question to the unsung efforts of one figure in conflict prevention: the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities.

The high commissioner's principle is to maintain whatever invisibility he can achieve. He believes that quiet, behind-the-scenes diplomacy is the way to achieve conflict prevention. He shuns any involvement with the media, and without the media, he believes that he can make progress. How many conflicts have been prevented by the high commissioner's efforts -- efforts never reported in the media?

It must, therefore, be asked whether invisibility is the answer to the question: What role for the media in conflict prevention? The media, however, would like to believe otherwise. At least in theory.

## Notes and References

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4. *Real-Time Television Coverage of Armed Conflicts and Diplomatic Crises: Does it Pressure or Distort Foreign Policy Decisions?* by Nik Gowing. Joan Shorenstein Barone Center, John F. Kennedy School of Government. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1994.
5. "Talking to the World About American Foreign Policy" by Nicholas Burns. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 4, Fall 1996, p. 12.

6. The 1996 *Report of Reporters Sans Frontières* concluded that "more advanced media do not necessarily go hand in hand with better quality information." Luton: University of Luton, 1996, p. 3.
7. See, for example, "The Dead and the Deadline" by Paul Meller. *The Guardian*, 25 March 1996.
8. "UN Peacekeeping -- Past Lessons and Future Prospects." Speech by the Rt. Hon. Malcolm Rifkind to the University of Edinburgh, 10 March 1995.
9. "Where is Kigali?" by Lindsey Hilsum. *Granta*, Autumn 1995, pp. 147 -- 8.
10. Kalb, "The Pentagon and the Press" (see note 3).
11. See, for example, a detailed description of the distorting impact of media coverage on governments and NGOs during the Rwanda crisis in "Reporting Rwanda: The Media and Aid Agencies" by Lindsey Hilsum. Paper submitted to the multidonor evaluation exercise on Rwanda coordinated by the Danish Foreign Ministry, March 1996.
12. See, for example, *Yugoslavie: la politique de la bande velpeau* by Alain Destexhe. Paris: Armand Colin, 1993.
13. See, for example, a critical assessment of the superficial, palliative nature of the U.S. response to the Goma cholera catastrophe during the Rwanda crisis in "Behind the CNN factor" by this author in the *Washington Post*, 31 July 1994. The U.S. dispatch of water trucks from California and logisticians from Frankfurt made good television pictures and suggested U.S. engagement. The reality was a minimalist U.S. policy born out of embarrassment, and maybe shame, at having failed to engage diplomatically in Rwanda four months earlier. The U.S. had rejected earlier UN requests for heavy airlift capacity to transport the 5,500 peacekeepers that had been pledged.
14. Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage* (see note 4).
15. Abstract from *The International Response to Conflict and Genocide: Lessons from the Rwanda Experience* by the Steering Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda. Published by the Danish Foreign Ministry, 1996.
16. Ibid., Vol. E, p. 66.
17. From the proceedings of a closed workshop at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) on 31 October 1995.
18. Quoted with permission from a presentation by Cameron R. Hume, political adviser at the U.S. Mission to the UN, to a Fulbright colloquium at the Centre for Defence Studies, Kings College, London, on 10 July 1996. Hume quoted "Global Humanitarian Emergencies 1996," a

paper released by the U.S. mission to the UN in February 1996. It details 23 "essentially internal conflicts" in progress at that time.

19. Britain's Minister for Overseas Development, Lady Chalker, has complained that 90 percent of the media coverage is for 12 percent of their work -- in war zones. In a speech on 20 March 1996 she asked why there was no coverage for the 88 percent of her ministry's work "that can prevent tragedy."

20. Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage* (see note 4).

21. "Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered," by Steve Livingston and Todd Eachus, *Political Communication*, Vol. 12 (1995): pp. 413 -- 429. See also "The CNN Effect: How Much Influence Does the 24-Hour News Network Really Have on Foreign Policy," by Warren P. Strobel, *American Journalism Review*, May 1996, pp. 32 -- 37. Strobel confirms Gowing's finding (see note 4) and details what he calls the "five myths" of the CNN effect and its claimed impact on the making of foreign policy.

22. Hilsum, "Where is Kigali?" p. 148 (see note 9).

23. See conclusions from deliberations of the Council on Foreign Relations conference, "US National Interests after the Cold War," at Wye Plantation, Maryland, 14 -- 16 December 1995. These have subsequently been codified into a checklist of "Blue, Red, White and Translucent Chips" published in *America's National Interests*, Cambridge, MA: Commission on America's National Interests at the Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, July 1996.

24. Hume's presentation to Fulbright Colloquium (see note 18).

25. PDD 25 on "Multilateral Peace Operations," 5 May 1994.

26. See, for example, "Clinton Makes Foreign Policy and Electoral Positive" by Tara Sonenshine of *Newsweek* and former special assistant to President Clinton and deputy director of communications for national security policy. *International Herald Tribune*, 15 May 1996.

27. "Principles Governing US Use of Force." Speech by National Security Adviser Anthony Lake at George Washington University, 8 March 1996.

28. For fuller analysis of "policy panic," see Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage* (see note 4).

29. An example is set out in "The Clash of Civilizations" by Samuel Huntington. *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 72, No. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22 -- 49.

30. Speech by National Security Adviser Anthony Lake to the Council on Foreign Relations, Washington, DC, 14 September 1994.

31. Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd, interview on *The Charlie Rose Show* (PBS), 28 September 1994.

32. Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage* (see note 4).

33. The author experienced an important example of this. On 29 June 1993, at the height of the campaign of ethnic cleansing, he held a five-hour interview with the Bosnian Serb military commander General Ratko Mladic in Zvornik. Mladic made clear his own assessment that although the major western powers were publicly trying to give every impression of a political determination to act tough against his forces, fundamentally they had no political will to make the kind of military commitments that would create serious problems for him. "I understand the West better than the West understands itself," Mladic boasted at one point, adding "I play chess better than the West plays chess." His military successes in the following two years up to the summer of 1995 and the new, proactive U.S. policy, proved the correctness of Mladic's analysis of Western inertia and lack of will to use overwhelming political pressure backed by decisive military force.

34. See, for example, "Nightmare in Liberia," editorial in the *Washington Post* published in the *International Herald Tribune*, 11 April 1996. The warring factions in Liberia are described as "at bottom, unrestrained, self-enriching bullies, who have turned their country into a graveyard."

35. "Behind the CNN factor: Lights! Cameras! Atrocities! But policy makers swear they are not swayed by the images," by Nik Gowing. *Washington Post*, 31 July 1994.

36. See, for example, the editorial by Marvin Kalb and Pippa Norris in *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Winter 1996, p.1.

37. "Conflict of Interest," an edited version of Martin Bell's speech to the Chichester Festival. Reprinted in *The Guardian*, 11 July 1996. "Journalism of attachment" was first proposed by Martin Bell at the NewsWorld 96 conference in Berlin, 22 November 1996. See "BBC Man Attacks Neutral War Reports," *The Guardian*, 23 November 1996.

38. For the British government's working definition of U.K. national interests, see paragraph 267 of the Ministry of Defence's Defence Estimates 1995. London: CMD 2800.

39. Proceedings of IISS closed workshop (see note 17).

40. "Why Foreign Policy Cannot Be Dictated by Blind Emotion" by Douglas Hurd, *The Standard*, 16 July 1996.

41. *In Harm's Way* by Martin Bell. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1995, p. 273.

42. Ibid., p. 133.

43. "The More Engagement in China the Better" by Thomas L. Friedman. Reprinted in the *International Herald Tribune*, 18 April 1996.

44. "Citizens Knowledge of Foreign Affairs" by Stephen. E. Bennett, Richard S. Flickinger, John R. Baker, Staci L. Rhine and Linda L.M. Bennett. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Spring 1996.

45. As a random sample, take "100 killed daily in Burundi's tribal war" by Sam Kiley, *The Times*, 5 July 1996. Also, "Slaughter at tea factory was work of Hutu rebels" by Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, 6 July 1996.

46. Proceedings of IISS closed workshop (see note 17).

47. "Toll at 304 in Burundi attack," Agence France Press, *International Herald Tribune*, 22 July 1996.

48. "Burundi Slides Towards Civil War" by Michela Wrong, *The Financial Times*, 27 July 1996.

49. Interview by the author with Lady Chalker, British Foreign Office Minister for Overseas Development, on BBC World TV, 31 July 1996.

50. Appearance by Sylvana Foa on BBC News, 25 July 1996.

51. Response by Nicholas Burns, 25 July 1996.

52. Kofi Annan, then head of UN Peacekeeping, said: "We have to move very quickly before everything blows up in our faces. History will judge us rather rely for Rwanda, and I don't think we can repeat that experience in Burundi," interview on BBC *World TV News*, 24 July 1996.

53. See, for example, "Act now to stop the killing in Burundi." Published appeal by International Crisis Group, 30 July 1996.

54. "East Africans `will invade to halt Burundi's war'" by Chris McGreal in *The Guardian*, 10 July 1996. As mediator between the Hutu and Tutsi factions in Burundi, the former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere was quoted as saying: "We can't allow another Rwanda. We will have to go in whether Burundi wants it or not."

55. *United Nations Association Bulletin*. London, 3 September 1996.

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58. "RAND Research Brief -- 2502," a summary of *Casualties and Consensus: The Historical Role of Casualties in Domestic Support for US Military Operations* by Eric V. Larson. Washington, DC: RAND, 1996.

59. See, for example, "Disasters debate: Whose disaster is it anyway? Rights, responsibilities and standards in crisis" by Peter Walker, Director of Disaster and Refugee Policy for the IFRC. Paper delivered to the *World Disasters Report* 1996 review conference, 23 May 1996.

60. "Should soldiers get off the humanitarian front line? Disasters, armies and the new world disorder" by Peter Walker. Paper delivered to the *World Disasters Report* 1996 review conference, 23 May 1996.

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62. Steering Committee, Vol. E, p. 66 (see note 15).

63. "Africa's Grisly Harvest of Death" by Chris McGreal. *The Observer*, 27 October 1996.

64. See, for example, "Liberia, who cares?" Letter from the field by Trevor Lines in a bulletin of UK *Medecins sans Frontières*, May 1996.

65. See, for example, the speech to the SHAPE-EX NATO conference in Brussels by then U.S. ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, 30 April 1996. "Overall, the evidence of the past five years is that UN peacekeepers can accomplish much where the local parties have grown weary of war, but they will have great difficulty where one or more parties remains more interested in conquest than co-existence." It has to be asked how even vivid media coverage can make a fundamental difference to Albright's frank assessment, with all the limits to conflict prevention it implies?

66. "OAU focuses on ethnic slaughter in Burundi" by Chris McGreal. *The Guardian*, 8 July 1996.

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68. See, for example, "Burundi army kills Hutu villagers in wake of coup" by Chris McGreal, *The Guardian*, 30 July 1996. "Hutu rage grows against Burundi's new Tutsi ruler" by David Orr, *The Independent*, 30 July 1996. "Killings by Tutsi-led-army fuel violence in Burundi: coup has provoked a vicious cycle of revenge" by Louise Tunbridge, *The Daily Telegraph*, 30 July 1996.

69. For full details, see Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage*, p. 80 (see note 4).

70. Bell, *In Harm's Way*, p. 143 (see note 41).

71. For a detailed argument, see Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage*, p. 20 (see note 4).

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73. For fuller details, see "Dictating the Global Agenda" by Nik Gowing in Spectrum, Summer 1991. Reproduced by the Royal Institute for International Affairs in *The World Today*, June 1991, p. 111.

74. Gowing, *Real-Time Television Coverage*, pp. 46 -- 55 (see note 4).

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84. From the proceedings of a closed IISS workshop on 31 October 1995.

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86. See, for example, the appeals of International Alert, London.

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88. "US Aide Sounds Alarm Over Burundi" by Joseph Fitchett. *International Herald Tribune*, 2 May 1996.

89. See "Suffering in Silence: Media Coverage of War and Famine in the Sudan" by Steven Livingston in *From Massacres to Genocide*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg and Thomas G. Weiss. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1996.

90. See, for example, *Humanitarian Crises: Meeting the Challenges*. Report of the Cantigny Conference Series supported by the Robert R. McCormick Tribune Foundation -- Conference at George Washington University, Washington, DC, 4 -- 5 May 1995, p. 11 ff.

91. Speech by U.S. AID Administrator Brian Attwood on the role of foreign aid and economic development as strategic weapons in preventive diplomacy; delivered 21 September 1995, Brussels.

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93. Burns, "Talking to the World," p. 14 (see note 5).

94. "Bringing Humanitarian News Into Prime Time" by Emma Bonino, *International Herald Tribune*, 28 June 1996.

95. See the introduction to *Somalia, Rwanda and Beyond: The Role of the International Media in Wars and Humanitarian Crises*, edited by Edward R. Girardet. Geneva: Crosslines Global Report, 1995.

96. Burns, "Talking to the World" (see note 5).

97. Remarks by Jon Snow, presenter, ITN *Channel Four News*, to the 1996 One World Broadcasting Trust awards ceremony, London, 20 March 1996.

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101. For confirmation of this author's analysis see, for example, Bonino, "Bringing Humanitarian News into Prime Time" (note 94). See also "The Shrinking of Foreign News," by Garrick Utley, *Foreign Affairs* 76(2), March/April 1997, pp. 2 -- 10.

102. "The Truth is Out" by John Pilger. *Broadcast*, 10 May 1996, p. 20.

103. See "ITV is Missing Out on Serious Opportunity," a letter by independent TV producer Mike Dodds in *Broadcast*, 17 May 1996. It was followed by a robust response from John Blake, Deputy Controller, Network Factual Programmes, in a letter, "The Facts About Documentary Output on ITV," in *Broadcast*, 24 May 1996.

104. See, for example, the 3-year review of ITN (Independent Television News) by Britain's Independent Television Commission, which concluded that ITN "provided a high quality news service with strong coverage over three years of foreign and domestic stories," December 1995.

105. See, for example, the personal reflection of Nicholas Burns, "Talking to the World," p. 14 (see note 5).

106. Snow, "One World *Broadcasting Trust*" (see note 97).

107. For one representative reminiscence, see "In the Death of a War Reporter and Father, a Lesson about Journalism" by John Darnton of the *New York Times*. Reprinted in the *International Herald Tribune*, 9 April 1996.

108. In October 1996, BBC TV news and the TV agencies transmitted news videos of the Afghan civil war by satellite phone at a speed equal to one-thirtieth of real time. Each 2-minute news story took 1 hour to feed. The resulting video quality was adequate, but not perfect. The use of telephone instead of TV satellite dish (with its transport and transmission costs) contributed to a significant cost saving.

109. See, for example, "Lap-Top Bombardiers and the Media: Threat or Asset?" by Nik Gowing. Presentation to the Royal College of Defence Studies, London, 20 November 1995.

110. Note, for example, the amateur Hi -- 8 video of the Israeli drone seen flying over the Qana refugee camp in South Lebanon around the time of the Israeli shelling in April 1996 that killed more than 100 people. The video was released by "The Independent" to major news organisations on 6 May 1996, about two weeks after the incident.

111. There is occasional and fragmentary contrary evidence such as "Look, Americans Do Care about Foreign Policy," by Thomas L. Friedman of the *New York Times*. *International Herald Tribune*, 2 May 1996.

112. Cantigny Conference Series, *Humanitarian Crises*, p. 14 (see note 90).

113. See, for example, remarks by Marcus Plantin of the ITV Network Centre to the Royal Television Society, 15 September 1995. See also information technology discussions at the World Economic Forum, Davos, 1 -- 6 February 1996. Note, in particular, the remarks by Professor Joel de Rosnay, Director for Development and International Relations, Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie, France, in his presentation on 3 February.

114. Steering Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, Vol. E, p. 66 (see note 15).

115. Bell, *In Harm's Way* (see note 41).

116. Hilsum, "Reporting Rwanda" (see note 11).

117. "The Third Genocide" by Alain Destexhe. *Foreign Policy*, No. 97, Winter 1994 -- 5, pp. 12 -- 13.

118. Steering Committee for Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda, Vol. E, p. 66 (see note 15).

119. "Blaming the Victim" by Tom Gjelten, *The New Republic*, 20 December 1993.

120. Mark Urban wrote these remarks in a book review of *The Quick and the Dead* by Janine de Giovanni. *London Sunday Times*.

121. "Making Peace With the Guilty" by Gen. Charles G. Boyd, Deputy Commander-in-Chief, U.S. European Command, 1992 -- 5. *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 74, No. 5, September/October 1995.

122. See, for example, "Selling the Bosnian Myth to America: Buyer Beware." Foreign Military Studies Office, Fort Leavenworth, KA, 1995.

123. Boyd, "Making Peace," pp. 23, 28 (see note 121).

124. See, for example, "A Conflict of Views: The Press and the Soldier in Bosnia" by Rod Thornton, formerly an officer serving with British UN forces in Sarajevo. Reprinted without the author's permission in *The South Slav Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3 -- 4, pp. 57 -- 58, but contents confirmed as genuine to Nik Gowing. Thornton wrote: "Journalists in Bosnia have subordinated the need for fair and objective reporting to their own perceived need to create a sloganeering, crusading, 'something must be done' approach that sits well with the need to fire the imagination of both casual reader and politician alike. And very often the truth does not fire imaginations. If truth is the first casualty of war, then objectivity is on the first stretcher behind it." Thornton then details examples.

125. "Glamour Without Responsibility," by 'Kenneth Roberts,' *The Spectator*, 5 March 1994, p. 12.

126. "Testament of an Interventionist" by Martin Bell. *British Journalism Review*, Vol. 4, No. 4, 1993, p. 9.

127. CNN *World Report* conference, May 1995.

128. "TV Giants Vie To Lure 'Brit Packer'" by Ed Vulliamy. *The Observer*, 19 May 1996, p. 23.

129. Ibid.

130. Boyd, "Making Peace," p. 29 (see note 121).

131. "The Million Dollar Action Woman" by Dina Rabinovitch. *The Guardian*, 6 July 1996.

132. "Exposing Genocide . . .," an interview with Roy Gutman by Sherry Ricchiardi. *American Journalism Review*, June 1993, pp. 32 -- 36.

133. *Seasons in Hell* by Ed Vulliamy. London: Simon and Schuster, 1994.

134. "This War Has Changed My Life," by Ed Vulliamy, *British Journalism Review*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1993, p. 5.

135. *Balkan Odyssey* by David Owen. London: Victor Gollancz, 1995, p. 84.

136. Boyd, "Making Peace" (see note 121).

17. 'Roberts,' "Glamour Without Responsibility" (see note 125).

138. In his valedictory telegram to the UN dated 9 January 1994, the outgoing UN Force Commander in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lt-General Francis Briquemont, wrote: "In Sarajevo the BiH [Bosnia-Herzegovina] army provokes the BSA [Bosnian Serb Army] on a daily basis. This is very easy for us to notice as the BiH mortars are generally located near UNPROFOR units and headquarters. Since the middle of December, the BiH army jumped another step by launching heavy infantry attacks from Sarajevo to the Serb held suburbs of the city. This is an important drift of the concept of Safe Areas. The BiH army attacks the Serbs from a Safe Area, the Serbs retaliate, mainly on the confrontation line, and the Bosnian presidency accuses UNPROFOR for not protecting them against the Serb aggression and appeals for air strikes against the Serb gun positions." Also, in "Making Peace," Boyd wrote: "The press and some governments, including that of the United States, usually attribute all such fire to the Serbs, but no seasoned observer in Sarajevo doubts for a moment that Muslim forces have found it in their interest to shell friendly targets." (pp. 28 -- 29, see note 121).

139. A notable exception was the BBC TV Panorama programme in January 1995 marking the departure of UNPROFOR commander, Lt. Gen. Sir Michael Rose, in which John Simpson challenged Bosnian prime minister Haris Silajdzic about the alleged high casualty figure in Bihac (later shown by the UN to be a wild exaggeration).

140. "Dateline Yugoslavia: The Partisan Press," by Peter Brock, *Foreign Policy*, No. 93, Winter 1993 -- 4.

141. See the letters published in *Foreign Policy*, No. 94, Spring 1994, pp. 158 -- 165.

142. "War Stories," by Charles Lane, *The New Republic*, 3 January 1994.

143. Boyd, "Making Peace" (see note 121).

144. See *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 1995.

145. David Binder of the *New York Times*, quoted in Gowing, "Real-Time Television Coverage," p. 63 (see note 4).

146. Owen, *Balkan Odyssey*, p. 113 (see note 135).

147. See, for example, "While America Watched: The Bosnia Tragedy," reported by Peter Jennings, ABC News, 17 March 1994.

148. Owen, *Balkan Odyssey*, p. 260.

149. "Anatomy of a Massacre," by David Binder, *Foreign Policy*, No. 97, Winter 1994 -- 5, p. 77.

150. *Ibid.*, pp. 70 -- 78.

151. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. London: Oxford University Press, 1993.

152. Speech by William Perry to John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 13 May 1996.

153. "Preventive Diplomacy: The Therapeutics of Mediation," presentation to a symposium at UN Headquarters, New York City, 23 -- 24 April 1996. Later published as "A Clinician's Caution: Rhetoric and Reality" in *Preventive Diplomacy: Stopping Wars Before They Start*, ed., Kevin M. Cahill. New York: Basic Books, 1996, pp. 305 -- 317.

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\* Deceased September 1996.

\*\* Deceased February 1995.